

AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

BY
CAROLINE STERN



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no. 1.

TO
MY MOTHER
WHOSE LIFE MADE ALL IDEALS
POSSIBLE



CONTENTS

MOTHER'S SONGS	PAGE
<i>I Mother Dawn</i>	9
<i>II At the Cradle</i>	9
<i>III Slumber Song</i>	10
<i>IV In the Quiet Hour</i>	11
<i>V The Shadow</i>	12
<i>VI Bereft</i>	13
TO A CHILD, JUST AWAKENED	15
LULLABY	16
MAMMY-LORE	17
MAMMY'S LULLABY	19
AN IDYL	20
THE GARDEN OF MISTRESS BESS	21
ALL IN KING GEORGE'S TIME	23
THE DAWN	25
NARCISSUS	27
LONELINESS	30
ARACHNE	33
YOUTH	35
BUT TWO	36

	PAGE
SONG	37
NIGHT HOURS	37
BEFORE YOUR COMING FEET	38
A JAR OF HONEY	39
THE HEALING	41
AN OLD TALE	43
TO TENNYSON	48
MARK TWAIN	49
THE POET	52
THE CELTIC REVIVAL	54
THE RED CROSS	55
GALATEA TO PYGMALION	56
THE NIGHT-BLOOMING JASMINE	57
THE SCHOOL-MISTRESS	58
A PARABLE	59
THE LITTLE NUN	60
THE EXILE	62
ON THE SWIFTWATER ROAD	63
AMID THE CONFLICT	65
HALLOWE'EN	66
AFTER-GRACE	67
A FAREWELL	69
EASTER SONG	70
GROWN OLD	71
IN LOUISIANA	73
THE ROSE	75

	PAGE
LOVE'S GIFTS	77
THE COLORIST	79
DUTY	80
THE MISTLETOE	81
THE PERFECT LOVE	83
FELLOWSHIP	85
WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT? . .	86
THE QUEEN DECIDES	87



*Butterfly, butterfly, spread out your wings,
Bear me aloft and away;
Away to the mystical region that rings
The edge of the practical day.*

*To the violet land at the edge of the world
Where fancy may rove at will,
May float where the opaline shadows lie curled
At the elf-queen's guarded sill;*

*Where sits Duty asleep with her head on her knees,
And Care growls beside her in dreams;
You may flutter your jewelled wings there as you
please,
No fear that he'll wake in their gleams.*

*Butterfly, butterfly, spread out your wings;
Are they clogged with the weight of the years?
Ah! this world-ache, this world-doubt that deadens
and clings,
Ah! this heavy air misty with fears!*

*Away! cast it off! what portion have we
With these grovellers creeping in dust!
We are winged, they are wingless; what kinship
may be?
Away! for we can and we must!*

*We are winged! then away! nevermore, nevermore!
For the meshes of brotherhood bind.
We are theirs, they are ours; we bear evermore
The bonds of our suffering kind.*

*The weight of all grief is the weight that we bear;
We are barred by the sins of all time;
The cry in our hearts is the cry that we hear
Upborne from the mud and the slime.*

*Nevermore to the child-world of nebulous dreams,
To the first Eden peace of the soul.
We are pledged to the passionate struggle that
streams,
Panic-struck, to an undefined goal.*

*We have seen, and the veil not again may be drawn,
We have heard, and forever shall hear;
There is work to be done ere the long-delayed dawn,
Ere the day of adjustment draws near.*

*Not as dreamer, but toiler, henceforth, among
things
Of the ruck and the murk and the steam;
Upheld, it may be, by a gleam on your wings
Of a light from the days of our dream.*

AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD



MOTHER SONGS

I

MOTHER DAWN

A dream is in thy face; thy veiled eyes brood
Above thy task; a sweet, uncertain mood
Hath carried thee beyond all ken of ours.
Art thou with Her, hedged round with lily flowers
Hearing once more the angel's "Blessed art thou"?
Across thy window blown, an apple bough,
Against the sky a tracery of bright wreaths,
In incense sweet its blossom-promise breathes
Of summer fruitage fair. The morning light
Sifts through thy muslin curtains, misty, white,
A halo round thee. Just so vaguely sweet,
So shimmering, wavering, brightly incomplete,
Thy musings, stitched into the fairy seams;
Till he, the newly-born, clothed in thy dreams,
Transmuting them to rosy flesh, shall lie
Soft in thine arms, a living sanctity.

II

AT THE CRADLE

How still he sleeps. The morning sunlight falls
Upon his downy head. A song-bird calls
Without the window. Young, rejoicing leaves
That garland the new Spring, a checkered shade

Upon the pillow throw; but his bright head is laid
In sunlight only; each soft cheek receives
The radiant kiss. One loving ray
Lies lightly on the parted lips where play
The frolic graces of a baby's dream;
These sportive curls have caught another gleam;
A golden gift it leaves in every tress. . . .
God bless my baby! Every sweet caress
That leaves its clinging joy about my heart,
Each loving hope — a loving fear in part,
Each whispered prayer his little bed beside,
Each fond, exulting pulse of mother's pride,
All he has brought of peace and guileless joy,
Return in blessings on my darling boy.

III

SLUMBER SONG

Sleepy head, go to bed,
" Now I lay me " has been said.
Mother's made a cosy nest,
Sleepy head must go to rest.

Sleepy eyes, baby wise,
Brightest stars in Mother's skies,
Hide your twinkling for the night,
Mother's kisses shut them tight.

Snug and warm, sleet or storm,
Sleepy head is safe from harm.
For higher watch than Mother keeps —
Angels wake while baby sleeps.

IV

IN THE QUIET HOUR

I

Little one, little one,
Lying lightly on my breast,
Helpless, cuddling, downy thing,
Soft cheek to my bosom pressed —
Can you hear its pulses sing
Love for you, my tender one?

Soft your velvet lips I kiss,
Crumpled like a poppy pink,
Sweeter than the flower-dew
Humming-birds, athirsty, drink.
Soft I drink — ah, would you drew
Stormless years with every kiss.

2

Little one, sleeping one,
Long I may not shelter give;
Not for long my arms may fold.
In the larger life you'll live,
Helpless I, whate'er it hold,
To protect you, little one!

Mary wondered o'er her Son;
Glory on the manger fell,
Kings and shepherds knelt in prayer.
Did no faintest shadow tell
Of the cross the Christ must bear,
Bear for you, my precious one?

3

Little one, helpless one,
Would I keep you in your nest?
Baby limbs within mine arm?
Baby head against my breast?
Keep you mine to shield from harm?
Wrong you so, beloved one?

I must yield you, little one;
Kneel beside the thorny way,
Watch you bear your cross alone;
Stretch mine arms and yearning pray,
Pray as Mary for her Son.
May He guide you, little one.

v

THE SHADOW

Lie still, little head, in thy nest;
Lie safe, little heart, upon mine;
For love is the watch of thy rest,
And angels with Mother combine

To guard thee asleep on my breast —
Lie safe, little heart, upon mine.

The rough wind may bluster without,
Not a curl shall he lift from thy cheek;
Shall not ferret thy hiding place out
Tho at crevice and cranny he seek;
Tho he shatter the oak in his rout,
Not an eyelash shall stir on thy cheek.

Unbidden there enters a guest —
Lie still, little heart, 'tis not thine!
His wings shall not darken thy nest,
'Neath their coldness my flower would pine;
I will hide him deep down in my breast —
Lie safe, little heart, upon mine.

VI

BEREFT

To paint him as he stood beside her knee,
His dimpled chin within his hollowed palm,
And his deep eyes in dreaming raised to hers —
To paint the look of innocence that lay
Within them — charm of utter sinlessness,
That whitened all her thoughts lest, unaware,
Some evil thing into the Paradise
Of his pure soul should enter through her sin; —
Recall the eager treble of his voice,
The loving touch of his soft, baby hands,

Th' insistent passion of his baby heart,
Her kingdom, where she held unrivalled sway —
This, Father, hast Thou left her! Is it well?
All tender hopes that clustered round the child
Deep buried with the lilies in his hand.
And she who, Mary-like, in days that were,
Had pondered all these things within her heart,
Sits dry-eyed in the shadow of her loss —
A woman left with idle, empty hands,
A mother left with empty, aching heart.

Oh, grief made sweet with holy memories —
Not empty while the warmth of little hands
Still lingers in the hands that listless lie;
Oh, never empty while thy brooding eye
Can trace the bright curls crushed against thy breast,
The rose of rounded cheek, the dewy sweep
Of sun-tipped lashes, all the baby grace
That nestled helpless in thy sheltering arms.
Oh, sacred mystery of love and loss!
Oh, shadow lost within the light that streams
About the vacant, angel-guarded tomb,
Far-streaming through the years that lie beyond.

TO A CHILD, JUST AWAKENED

What thro' the night hours hast thou seen?
Within what spirit world hast been?
That thou, last eve a bit of clay,
A little satyr worn with play,
The tender scorn of one and all,
A rosy little animal,
Shouldst wake at morn a thing divine,
A mystic who has crossed the line
Into the world unseen? There lies
Its awe in thy wide-lidded eyes.

LULLABY

Sleep, my darling, sleep!
The little brown cricket is singing his song,
Hush, hush,
On fields of moon-mist the shadows are long;
Behind Mother's rocker a-tiptoe they throng;
Sleep, my beautiful, sleep!

Sleep, my darling, sleep!
A-tiptoe they caper and waver and prance,
Hush, hush,
From carpet to ceiling they glide and they glance,
A spell for my baby they weave as they dance;
Sleep, my beautiful, sleep!

Sleep, my darling, sleep!
Little lids falling like blankets of snow,
Hush, hush,
Slowly they cover the violets below,
Dear little violets nestled in snow;
Sleep, my beautiful, sleep!

MAMMY-LORE

Once Mammy took me out to walk.
I heard a partridge in the grass.
I never knew a bird could talk
So plain; and now we never pass
But he calls to us as we walk —
And Mammy says, "It's like his sass."

For Mammy says he says:

"Bob, Bob, White,

Peas all right!

Won't be home before Saturday night!"

Down in the pasture pond the frogs,
Says Mammy, are like naughty boys.
At night they hop on two old logs
And there they make a mighty noise.
Little frogs and great big frogs
Just quarreling like boys.

Mammy says the little frogs say:

"Go-back! go-back! go-back!"

But the big frogs say,

"Knee-deep, knee-deep, knee-deep!"

One time I heard a hoot owl cry.
'Twas in the middle of the night;
The wind sang "By-lo, hush-a-by."
I was not scared — the moon was bright,
And Mammy came — I did not cry,
But Mammy thought I might.

*And Mammy told me what the owl said. She
says he says:*

*"I cook for my wife, er who cooks fer
you-u-all?"*

*"I cook fer my wife, er who cooks fer
you-u-all?"*

MAMMY'S LULLABY

Bye, Mammy's baby-boy, go ter sleep;
 (Bob-white's er whistlin' in de cawn.)
Li'l chickabiddies, dey say "Cheep, cheep!"
 (By, by, baby, twel de mawn.)

Sun's gwine down at de en' er de road;
 (Bob-white's er whistlin' in de cawn.)
All de willis-whistlers 'll soon be abroad,
 (Baby gwine ter sleep twel de mawn.)

Soon all de niggers 'll be drappin' er de hoe,
 (Bob-white's er whistlin' in de cawn.)
Li'l marster's sleepin', better walk tippy-toe.
 (Baby gwine ter sleep twel de mawn.)

Daddy comes er ridin' on his big, grey hoss,
 (Bob-white's er whistlin' in de cawn.)
"Heigh dar, Mammy, whar de little boss?"
 (Don' you wake dis chile twel de mawn.)

Bye, Mammy's baby-boy, go ter sleep!
 (Bob-white's er whistlin' in de cawn.)
Mammy's gwine ter pray Mars Jesus fer ter keep
 Watch over baby twel de mawn.

AN IDYL

A little maid a-dancing
 Beneath a china-tree.
The sun-flecks there a-glancing
About her small feet, prancing,
 Flit not more lightsomely.

Her tangled hair is yellow,
 Her rosy knees are bare;
The wind is her playfellow;
Where the golden shadows mellow
 They tread a measure there.

Her little feet are twinkling,
 Her slender arms outspread,
Her firefly eyes are crinkling
At a mocking-bird that's sprinkling
 His bright notes overhead.

He trills and thrills above her,
 She gurgles silver glee.
How can I help but love her
For the tender sweetness of her,
 A-dancing airily?

THE GARDEN OF MISTRESS BESS

Mistress Bessie hath a garden;
 Could you guess
 What Mistress Bess,
Dainty, slim, and sweet, and fair,
Being self both watch and warden
Of this little elfin garden,
Hath ordained should blossom there?

Not a rose; too fine are they.
 Ladies fair
 With courtly air
Thro' Kings' halls should move sedately.
Gathered here in rich array,
I can fancy Bess' dismay,
Overawed by dames so stately.

Not a lily, white and cold;
 Pale as queen
 By minstrel seen
Shut within some lonely castle.
Not a dahlia flaunteth bold,
Knightly banner, red and gold,
Rescue bound like loyal vassal.

Nestling in trim garden plots,
 Cheerful, sweet,
 About her feet,
Heartsease nod a bright good-morrow.

Clustering close in shining dots,
Jewel-like forget-me-nots
Mock the sky whose blue they borrow.

Faintly, in the early morning,
Mignonette,
With pale eyes wet,
By Sweet-pea's wild pranks dismayed,
Smiles a tearful, nunlike warning;
Sweet-pea, prunes and prisms scorning,
Romps like any country maid.

So old-fashioned, it were fitting
Mistress Bess,
In flowered dress
Of a style long since forgot,
Capped and mittened, should be sitting
Prim and placid with her knitting,
Quaint as her quaint garden spot.

As it is, in Bessie's garden
Not a posy
Is more rosy,
Simply modest, freshly fair,
Than is Bess, the dimpled warden
Of this pleasant little garden,
Sweetest flower that blossoms there.

ALL IN KING GEORGE'S TIME

A dame within a gateway stood,
Three children played beside the road,
When up a stalwart soldier strode,
('Twas in King George's time.)

Sing hey, the little rebels,
Sing ho, the little rebels,
'Twas face about and march again,
Sing hey, the little rebels.

The soldier's coat was scarlet gay;
The woman turned her head away,
The children scattered at their play,
(All in King George's time.)

Sing hey, the burly Redcoat,
Sing ho, the burly Redcoat,
'Twas heave a sigh and wipe his eye.
Sing hey, the burly Redcoat

The woman held a one year's child.
The homesick soldier's eye was mild,
The baby stretched its arms and smiled,
(All in King George's time.)

Sing hey, the traitor baby,
Sing ho, the traitor baby,
The peace of God lay in its eyes.
Sing hey the traitor baby.

For wife and child on an English farm,
(God shield the father from all harm!)
He kissed the babe on its mother's arm,
(All in King George's time.)

Sing hey, the gentle redcoat,
Sing ho, the softened mother,
'Twas "Keep you safe," and "Speed you well,"
Sing hey, the rebel mother.

THE DAWN

In its banded rose and gold and grey,
It's one great star on guard alway,
 Unweariedly,
 It may not be
Unlike its brother, eve.
 But eve is gay
And garrulous; we leave
 The work-shop of the day
With straightening of shoulders that were bent,
With hum of tongues, with jests and merriment.
 We draw into the game,
 Like children at their play,
 The miracle of sunset; gayly name
 Fantastic clouds that flame
 An angel, or a beast with shaggy mane,
 A jinn in wreath of smoke, again,
 A fiery city. The echoes of the day,
 Grown soft and softer as they die away,
Still through the gorgeous sunset pageant chiming
 play.

At dawn
The brain wakes wondering; the spell
 Of dreams forgot makes alien
Familiar things. A little space we dwell
 Newcomers from afar. The first of men
 Perhaps so waked in Eden.

Diaphanous, upon the sleeping lawn
Lies the thin mist.
Within the hour the sun will lift the veil
From his wan bride; will wake her to keen life
And glancing smiles and vivid gleams
Of dancing color; beautiful, but rife
For good or ill. Now lies she pale;
And still unkist,
Now sleepeth, wrapped in holy dreams.—
The world is hushed. The little birds a-stir
With sweet, excited chatterings, and whirl
Of little wings, but make the balm
Of silence soother. There is awe
And worship. In the sacramental calm
We feel the pulsing of eternal law.
We something understand, but know not what;
For wordless thoughts, emotions objectless
Throng rarified. Who wake while others sleep,
Who vigil keep,
Watch from their vantage spot
A wide horizon.
Man grows less,
God, more, in the fair promise of the dawn.

NARCISSUS

The young Narcissus leans above the spring.

What sees he therein?

"Narcissus! Narcissus!" the scornful nymphs sing,

"Wilt cast thyself in?

Or wait on the bank for thy true-love to rise?

Cold heart, that the love of our best could despise,

Lo, now for himself in vain longing he dies!"

And one casts a stone in the smooth-bosomed spring;

The circles spread wide,

The fair image is troubled by ring upon ring;

All morn at his side

They had mocked, and the youths that were with
them mocked too.

He had seen, mirrored bright upon bright, mirrored
blue,

Arms locking, lips meeting, youth and maid, two by
two.

The young Narcissus leans above the spring,

His sad eyes dream on;

The bat lightly brushes the dusk with his wing,

The mockers are gone.

"Narcissus! Narcissus!" far off on the hill;

On the breeze it blows near, the spring blurs to
its thrill;

Not unloved is the voice that death could not still.

He had fled from it, cast it away for his dream,
And what was the cost
Is writ on the wan face bent over the stream;
Yet spurned, 'tis not lost;
Still it follows him, breathes over IT as o'er him;
In the water, the vision smiles, faint-lined and dim,
Its presence, voice-loved, fills the air to its rim.

A shadow, himself — not himself! — In the glow
Of a youth rich as wine,
A transfigured self he was given to know,
Its spirit divine!
His soul sank before it in triumph, in pain;
That glorified self it was his to attain,
If the strength were but sent him, the road but
made plain.

Not to thee alone, Greek boy, pale-cheeked, hollow-
eyed,
That vision was given!
Full many a young monk in his cloister has died
With eyes toward Heaven.
Light glowed within light; God had called him
“ My son ”;
Reach God he must! That the goal might be won
He had stripped his heart bare; with the world he
had done.

Still the soul of youth loses the world as he leans
O'er the wondrous ideal!

Half-fledged, he can't grasp to the full what it
means;

Alone it seems real!

Alone to be heeded, tho earth voices call;

Alone to be sought, tho his arms empty fall;

Youth and strength, life and love — alone, 'tis
worth all!

LONELINESS

There's one knocketh at my door;
Knocketh low, knocketh ever.
But my heart in anxious trembling
Seeks to turn him with dissembling,
That strange guest who owns no brother —
(Nay, methought — perhaps one other) —
Hist! he knocketh, ceasing never,
And the sound grows more and more.
Shall I ope to him my door?

Shall I seat him on my hearth?
Fitful, fierce, the log-fire blaze.
When its flame hath fallen to embers,
Bent and ashen, life remembers.
When the soul in age sits blinking —
Momently her spent coals sinking —
She's scarce conscious in the daze
Of her old years' drought and dearth,
Of the guest upon her hearth.

I am young; my heart beats full.
What hath that grim guest with me?
So I call the passing stranger,
Clutching like a man in danger;
So I fill my soul with revel,
Scarce I ask " Art god or devil? "
If he save from him that knocketh,

That grim Loneliness that knocketh,
Knocketh ever. Patient he,
Sure of entrance, masterful,
My full-flowered years to cull.

Tireless stands he, cowed in grey;
Knocketh low, knocketh ever.
Strange the gentle call may win
Through the sound of song within!
That my feet, unwilling, lead
To the casement o'er his head,
Staring, staring at my dread
As one stares at films of fever
In the pale hour before day!
Lo, he turns his head this way!

Comes once more that prescience near,
Sense of some one seen before.
Someone standing, patient, stooping,
As who listeneth, His head drooping,
Wistful as a god that knoweth,
And who, knowing, service oweth;—
Christ might knock so at my door.
Christ! Ah, heart, that crouched in fear,
Shall He send and I not hear?

Christ, who was my guest of late,
Guest in gladness gone too soon!
Shared the glory of the morning,
Brightest of the sons of morning;
At my table sat and feasted;
Of my wine cup drank and blessed it;
Strung my happy heart in tune
With the angels that await
God's "Good-morning" at His gate.

Comes this messenger to bless?
Bears he knowledge I must know?
Silent as Gethsemane,
Stark as grim Golgotha tree,
Yet Christ sought him — Christ, that other —
Sought as brother seeketh brother;
Comrade sole in hour of trial —
Devil temptings, stern denial,
Hollow round of earth and sky
Tenantless. The soul may fly
Here and yon, and everywhere
Crouches silence in his lair.—
In such vasts, unterrified,
Can my shrinking spirit bide?

.
Lo, his eyes, how deep and mild —
Yearn as father's over child.

Wait, my master, I will go,
Gird my soul in trustfulness,
Seek Christ in the wilderness.

ARACHNE

A fairy web across my book shelves flung;
A matchless 'broidery in defiance hung
Just where in stately volumes, black and broad,
The treasured wisdom of an age lies stored.
Ah, thou presumptuous! darest again invade
The precincts sacred to the heavenly maid?
No more the rainbow of thy loom she fears;
In ghostly grey thy misty net appears;
In crouching lowliness more aptly meant,
Sackcloth and ashes of the penitent.
And where the sunlight through the lattice brought,
Sobered to suit a scholar's sober thought,
Lends still a glow to dusky tomes and walls,
How cold his glance upon thee, culprit, falls.

Is penance meant? Art culprit, thou? I see
As I this morning saw, when with the bee,
Leaving my treasure cell, I sought repose
Within the sweet air of my garden close.
The dew lay thick on every bud and blade,
Sparkling like genii jewels richly laid
Upon the casement in the Arab tale.
Here, clasped upon the breast of lily pale;
There, glowing in the deep heart of the rose;
Set like a coronal upon the brows
Of stately shrubs. Between two leafy sprays
Of blossoming lilac hung the fragile maze
Of thy light wheel with glistening threads outspun,

Breeze-stirred and silver-shining in the sun.
The bright dew, shaken from the leafy prop,
Hung from the rounds in many a jeweled drop,
Gleaming in blue and green and rose and gold.

There shouldst thou spin and there thy triumph
 hold;
Olympus' summit to the maid divine
Leave thou, the garden and the sunlight thine.

YOUTH

My body held a merry guest

A many years ago.

He made of it a songful nest

A many years ago.

He sang through storm, he sang through shine;

His blood was quick as beaded wine,

His speech was like a wild rose vine,

A many years ago.

The sad folk came from far and near

A many years ago.

His wilful caroling to hear,

A many years ago.

His mouth an April sun had kist;

He was of faerie folk, they wist.

He vanished like the morning mist

A many years ago.

BUT TWO

In all the world there live but two;
But two the world over!
There are but two eagles that wing the blue,
Two larks that scatter the morning dew
From their grassy cover.

In all the world there are but two,
But two, the world over!
“For 'tis you for me and I for you,
But you and me in a love-bond true!”
Thus the heart of the lover.

SONG

Your eyes were once my healing springs,
And when my strength would fail,
Deep of their sweetness would I drink,
And I again was hale.
I'd drink deep of their welling love,
And it would make me hale.

I am so tired, O love, my love,
So very tired am I;
Yet should I stay my halting steps
And sit me down to cry,
What comfort would there be for me?
What care or comfort nigh?

NIGHT HOURS

Night — and the moonlight sleeping,
And sleep for all but me.
Night — and the night hours creeping
Wearily, wearily.

Night — and the old pain beating
A fevered threnody,
And the old and the new day meeting
Wearily, wearily.

BEFORE YOUR COMING FEET

Before your coming feet
The garnered hours lie sweet
With thoughts of you.— They fluttered down,
Green-gold and red and homely brown,
With hopes for you; they circling flew,
Silk wings that searched the waste for you;
When, lo! — a stillness! How they know
I can not tell. No more they go;
But restful, now, fulfilled, complete,
They wait the coming of your feet.

A JAR OF HONEY

Gold of bees harvesting,
Glimmer of dew,
Fragrance of honeyed vine
Flowering anew,

Thrill of the Springtime,
Fullness of June,
Leaf-choir and bird-choir
And heart-song in tune ;

Humming-bird pulsing,
Star-throated lover,
Waxen blooms bending
Pallidly over ;

Pan and his satyrs,
Wood glade sun-flecked ;
Rest hour of Dian,
Her windy course checked ;

Gnarled boughs bend over,
A reedy stream slips ;
Honeycomb staining
Red, covetous lips ;

White limbs and brown limbs
Relaxed from the chase;
Pan, from his high ledge,
Laughs of his grace;

Pan, the glad-hearted,
His hairy sides shake;
Warm-throated white ones
The laughter uptake;

White of the moon-chase,
Brown of the earth,
Mellow-voiced trilling
And shrilling their mirth;

Wreathed hair tossed backward,
Wood spaces ring —
After long ages
Awaked the notes spring.

Caught in thy meshes
As sunshine was caught,
Trapped, while their cerements
Swift the bees wrought.

Magic thy brew is,
The Golden Age lent thee,
Pan, the undying,
Forgiving, hath sent thee.

THE HEALING

It was a day of wind and cloud;
My heart was sore and lone.
Yet I, that could have cried aloud,
Might make not any moan.

For scarce myself knew what I lacked,
Nor whereof I was fain,
Nor what dull grief my spirit racked,
Nor what might ease my pain.

The scudding clouds they fled o'erhead
As they themselves would flee;
As I would flee the nameless dead
Of past years waked in me.

.

'Twas like a silver chime at night,
Heard in dim wonderment;
Or like an amber-ringèd light
When dark was immanent.

'Twas like a wingèd seed that sprang
To strength of blade and fruit—
Your voice that like the morning sang
When mine own heart was mute.

O Friend, what magic in your words
That I was comforted?
The heart is full of singing birds,
That late lay stark and dead.

AN OLD TALE

I

The cliff falls sheer with a dizzy drop,
But a stair winds down to the sandy shore
From the rugged castle built on top.
The steps are an hundred and fifty and four
From the Princess' tower to the cottage door,
Yet the Princess trips them, slender and sweet;
Like gems on the stone fall her silken feet.
The cottage is tiny and dark within,
And the spinner sits at her door to spin.

Whir-r-r-r! Turn the wheel,
Turn the wheel, turn the wheel.
The shining thread winds round the reel,
Round the reel, round the reel;
'Tis fine as the strand of light where sways
The spider dreaming his finished maze,
While swinging, swinging, to and fro,
Whichever way the wind doth blow.

Whir-r-r-r! Turn the wheel,
Whirl the reel, whirl the reel.
The Prince shall come on a golden keel;
Turn the wheel, turn the wheel;
The pale-cheeked fisher-boy may stay
His idle boat in the windless bay;
His eyes are sad, but what care I;
I shall spin my thread till the Prince rides by.

II

One is a princess in velvet gown,
 And one is a spinner in fustian brown,
 Yet what shall two maids talk about
 When winds are restless and spring calls out
 With a voice of song the whole day long,
 And the mesh of her dreams is woven strong.
 They spoke of the Prince in a far-off land —
 "His eyes are blue," said the spinner-maid;
 "And bright his hair as the flax on my wheel,
 Or yonder butterflies that reel
 Round about and in and out
 Like bits of sunlight blown about."
 The Princess thought, tho she nothing said,
 Of blown, brown curls — it was on the sand —
 She had wandered to gather the little, pink shells
 Thrown up by the waves from the deep-sea cells;
 He had held a net in his idle hand;
 And his eyes were dark with tears unshed —
 But the Prince might come with the turn of the tide,
 And who but a prince might claim as his bride
 The highest lady in the land.
 "Let his eyes be blue," the princess said.

III

The dark-eyed fisher-boy sits on the sand
 With a broken net in his idle hand.
 His brothers' boats are far on the bay;

He is under a spell the gossips say;
Or hath the maiden said him nay?
For ever he haunteth the tide-swept shore
Below the spinner-maiden's door.
He comes not nigh; he sits alone,
And only the sea-birds hear his moan —

O Mary Mother, pity me!
The sea-gulls fly
Through the windy sky,
But they call no more,
“Oh, follow me,
Follow, follow, follow free
To the gates of gold across the sea!”
O Mary Mother, never more!
Pity me, pity me!

She came this way,
And her eyes were sweet;
On the sands I lay.
The little wavelets, eager and fleet,
Ran up the beach to kiss her feet,
Her little feet,
Her silken feet;
They left their tiny print in the sand.
I kissed it when she went away.
It were not meet
A fisher-boy should kiss her feet;
But none save the little waves might see
That I kissed her foot-print in the sand.

She stooped to gather the little, pink shells
That the sea throws out from its dark-blue
cells.

She held the largest in her hand
Close to her ear

That she might hear

The voice of the sea.

Her eyes were sweet — Did she look at
me?

Mary Mother, pity me!

IV

The wheel of the spinner is put away;
She hath earned her rest thro' a toilsome day;
She hath braided her hair and said her prayer,
And her thoughts were such as a maid should wear;
Yet now she sleepeth restlessly,
Her lashes flutter on her cheek;
The priest hath called her holy and meek,
But who can tell what thoughts may run
Thro' the ordered brain by sleep set free
Of a prim little spinner whose work is done.—
“For a prince comes sailing over the sea.
He rideth by but he smiles at me.
Oh, the princess waiteth, and fair is she,
But his first smile is given to me.
He rideth by and he comes no more,
But I shall sit at my cottage door
And weave a cloth for sweet Mary
Because Her grace was given to me.”

By night and by day she hears them play,
 The waves of the sea at the foot of the tower,
 And what they tell her none can say;
 For never a great king on his throne,
 Not a prince who comes from lands unknown
 Can guess what a princess dreams in her bower
 When her maids are sleeping and she sits lone.
 What they tell her none can say,
 Unless it be a boy adrift
 Far below in a fisher boat;
 For the prayer the warder may not hear,
 The willing wings of the wind are swift
 To bear to a listening princess' ear;
 And a princess' sigh can downward float,
 Half in fervor and half in fear,
 Downward to the fisher boat
 To mingle with the fisher's moan —

Mary Mother, pity me!
 I cannot sleep, I cannot pray;
 I can but weep by night and day
 For love of a love that is not for me.
 O Mary Mother, pity me!

TO TENNYSON

Thy song, O Laureate, what was it like?
Not like the sweetness of the lute that moans
Dead passions, sensuous grief for wasted loves,
Tuberose and jessamine, whose pallid sweets
Oppressive, speak of death, not life. Oh, sweet,
Lovely, and sweet are they, but all too sweet.
The dead alone may bear them, and we lay
Their fragrance on a bier. It is not well
To linger near death's body, even in love.
So out into the free, untainted air
Where life abounds; and in thy shining song,
Life; and strong hope and health. Thy manhood
stands
Erect. O Singer of the golden day,
Long may thy vibrant echoes ring the land,
Voice answering voice from crevasse, dale, and scar,
From peak to distant peak, until is lost
The sluggish moan of him who lies inert,
Wooing his own wan face in Hippocrene.

MARK TWAIN

(A NOCTURNE OF THE MISSISSIPPI)

Who speaks of care, of toil, of time?
The night-wind cools the heated deck.
The minstrel river sings in rhyme,
And gathers largesse in our wake.
And like a refrain, solemn, slow,
The rousters' chant floats from below,
 "Ma-a-r-r-k twa-a-ain,"
 "Ma-ark twa-ain, 'tis!"

How long the sound trails through the air
And winds among the spectral banks,
Till lost in mystic shadows there
Where close the willows draw their ranks;
And still the echoes, solemn, slow,
Come back in whispers as we go,
 "Ma-ark twa-ain,
 Ma-ark twa-ain, 'tis!"

A firefly shows a moment's gleam,
Or is't a lantern's flickering light?
A boy's laugh, faint as fading dream,
Blends with the voices of the night.
Hark! Where the banks retreat in shade
Is that Huck Finn's low signal made?

Mark Twain,
 Mark Twain, 'tis!

His spell is mingled with the night,
The phantoms roll in changing line —
A cabin on Sierra's hight,
A castle on the storied Rhine.
The out-worn East, the new-born West —
Like wind-reefs on the river's breast.

Mark Twain,

Mark Twain, 'tis!

His book lies open on my knee,
Read till the tender page grew dark,
Enwrought with tender fantasy,
The story of Joan of Arc,
The fairy tree, the battle chance,
The heaven-led peasant maid of France.

Mark Twain,

Mark Twain, 'tis!

Faith-fraught and high, each noble word
Retouches still the patriot deed,
And still a man's strong pity heard
For a suffering girl in her martyr need,
The mystery there, the wonder-thrill,
And yet the woman, helpless, real.

Mark Twain,

Mark Twain, 'tis!

I may not say the thing I feel,
My pipe is but an humble reed ;
The master's hand has waked the thrill
Of high pride in a godlike deed.
The spirit vision, making seem
Yon star, the star of Bethlehem.

Mark Twain,

Mark Twain, 'tis!

THE POET

When earth was young,
Dew-souled, star-girdled, seraph-sung,
Yet pagan in its wildling grace because so newly
sprung,
Then, when its teeming clay was fragrant with the
freshness of its morn,
Young birds a-dart on skimming wings above its
fields unshorn,
In that first, thrilling, rapturous burst his pulsing
soul was born,

His sensitive breast,
Responsive as the opal's crest,
Still keeps the film of cloudlets shot with rose-fire
from the west,
The green of vivid woodland pools where gleaming
things dart to and fro,
The purple of the shadows cast on twilight fields of
snow,
The flame of windy gardens wherein wanton tulips
grow.

But once he stood
Heart-struck at foot of Holy Rood
Where Christ's forsaken cry went up, a human cry
to God.
That Christly sorrow passed to him, and, bleeding
thro' its shining span,
Left all his world empurpled with the crying blood
of man,
That cries to God from every clod that calls itself
a man.

The heir of light,
His earliest iridescent right
Is shivered thro' with shapes of dread and fantasies
of night.
Yet in that mingling he is one as Christ was one with
God and man,
His kindred grasp with each in clasp completes the
destined span;
His visions voice the love of God and the dumb
prayers of man.

THE CELTIC REVIVAL

Like the sougning of the wind among the branches,
Like the echo of a sorrow heard in dreams,
Comes the eerie song of him that newly waketh,
The wild-heart Celt beside his murmuring
streams.

A singing as of sprite within the forest,
A sweet and restless voice that moans and moans;
A white-armed phantom seeking a lost lover
Wails in the wind around ancestral stones.

Was never song that moves us like that singing;
Our hearts had half forgot their nameless kin;
But dimly now along the music winging
The sweet, lost lure of faerie and of jinn.

THE RED CROSS

Ye seek the King? Lo, where He sits in state
Beside a white Judean well! Ye bear
A fragrant ointment to anoint Him there?
Yea, He will need it as the hour grows late;
But now He keeps His court. Around Him wait
His Father's charge — the worn, the blind, the bare,
The halt, the maimed — left to His kingly care —
The unclean, spurned beyond the outer gate.
And ye are royal, coming in His name,
Royal in service to the suffering,
In that ye sheltered when the homeless came,
In that ye fed the poor and hungering.
Your warrant His; His spirit ye are of.
Beloved, ye are of God, and God is love.

GALATEA TO PYGMALION

Lo, I am here! From some vast void forgot
Awaked, nor ever shall I sleep again.
Methought I heard a voice that cried in pain,
And I was I — Before, I know not what —
Living or dead! For memory is not
Of aught before thee. Master, I had lain
Insensate ages longer, but thou, fain
Of me, didst call; — my soul of thine begot!

Awake! To what? O master, shall I fear?
Strange lightnings, sudden darks are in my soul.
Hold thou me fast, thy voice within mine ear;
Hold thou and lead; I know not path nor goal.
No knowledge have I save of thee a-near,
Thee and my trembling heart. Love, shall I
fear?

THE NIGHT-BLOOMING JASMINE

Pale flower, dim, sweet star of night,
Breath of the south at prayer,— high purity
And fine reserve art thine, yet quiveringly
Thy passion in rich fragrance thrills like light
Along the brooding sense; until not quite
The soul may know its exaltation heavenly;
Until not quite, its joy from pain set free,
May one feel sure 'tis anguish or delight.

Yet sacred falls thy bounty on the soul,
Thine incense is as breath of benison
From some grail seeking knight one chances on
In yellowed pages of an ancient scroll.
Heaven touched with earth thy throbbing essence made,
A Lancelot pure, a passionate Galahad.

THE SCHOOL-MISTRESS

Her place is not among the women blessed
With grace of motherhood. Not hers to wear
That halo of God's surest trust; to share
A little space His godhead; nor to nest,
Life of her life, upon a sheltering breast
A tender babe. Oh, wonderful to bear
The burden, heavy-sweet, of mother care —
Instead, a hunger, gnawing unconfessed.
Yet not a hunger all unsatisfied.
The Great Economist her heart hath stored
With fruitful warmth. There troops a rosy
 horde,
Spendthrifts of love. Her motherhood, grown
 wide,
All childhood coddles in the nest of one.
Mother — perhaps where mother there is none.

A PARABLE

The trodden path was sunny smooth,
And many thousands journeyed there.
He asked them why, and they, good sooth,
With curling lip or stony stare,
Transfixed with scorn the hapless youth —
Had not their fathers worn it bare?

And when he tried, the erring wight,
To turn him from the ways of men,
To cut his rough way to the hight —
(Be his the toil and theirs the gain;
Perchance his way might prove the right)
Why then? — oh, then! — they stoned him
then!

THE LITTLE NUN

A nun peeped out into the world,
 (For blossoms burst and birds awake!)
A little nun with a mind unsoiled,
Shrinkingly furled like a fern close-coiled.
 (Alas! for innocent hearts that ache!)

They had told her the devil was lord therein,
That as the Christ had never been
The world was lost in its tangle of sin.

She saw the children at play in the street;
The flag-stones rang to their prancing feet,
The high walls echoed their laughter sweet;

She saw young lovers with arms entwined;
Alack, little nun with the unsoiled mind
That yearned and panted for love of its kind!

She saw fond mothers with babe at breast,
And her bosom was filled with a vague unrest,
A sense of loss that might not be exprest.

The gates shut fast on the nun once more.
She knelt her down on the chapel floor
And pardon prayed for a sin full sore.

Yet still, as she prayed, a vision would rise
 (For blossoms burst and birds awake!)
Of the meeting of human hearts human-wise,
And God's love speaking through human eyes.
 (Alas! for innocent hearts that ache!)

THE EXILE

Go where I will there is no rest;
I wander from my heart away;
It lies in a tower of lofty crest,
But there, alas! I may not stay.

Around the tower the fields are green,
And great, dark oaks like islands lie
Close-massed amid the emerald sheen —
How happy there, my heart and I!

At distance, pleasant mansions smile,
Their faint smoke idling in the breeze;
The dimplings of a creek beguile
The gnarlèd willows to their knees.

There, heaven at morn smiles mistily,
A-twin to fields of happy dew;
At noon it spells infinity,
So deep, so vast its doméd blue.

At eve, the liquid sky is red,
In burning, cloudless rose it gleams;
Such light was never elsewhere shed
Save here and in the land of dreams.

How happy were my heart and I
Within that lordly tower to stay!
My home lies where my heart doth lie,
But I must wander far away.

ON THE SWIFTWATER ROAD

A white road shut in like old cloister walks
By tangled trees close-grown on either side,
Cypress and thorn; rank vines; brown, brittle stalks;
Black-fruited berry branches festooned wide;

A narrowing vista and a reddening sky; —
Canst feel the charm of these, the deep, deep peace?
No blare of color, rich and warm they lie,
Grey-greens, soft umbers, purple of wine lees.

A break in the thick walls — a cotton field
Outridges fanlike toward the boundary
Where close-encircling woods with mystery sealed
Somber and deep against the sunset lie.

Not elsewhere Nature seems so full of rest.
Peace rises like an incense from the ground,
Peace in the liquid lighting of the west,
Peace in the purpling of the near woods bound.

And in this consecrated spot — a grave!
(An instant heart-throb gives the awed salute
Of life to death.) The berry branches wave
Across the stone, aslant, moss-grown, and mute.

How came it here? No legend lingers now
Recording wish or ban or privilege;
No man can tell when this man lived or how,
Nor who lies buried at the field's rank edge.

One with sweet earth beneath this tender sky,
One with all growth her rains and dews unseal —
Yet, toward the public road where men pass by
That lonely stone slants with a mute appeal.

AMID THE CONFLICT

Still blown like chaff before the wind,
 We flutter to the hidden goal.
O God! for constancy of mind!
 For steady purpose, strength of soul!

It is not that we fail to know
 Or fail to love the thing that's good;
The thing we would not that we do,
 Like Paul, nor do the thing we would.

Speak Thou! Confusedly our clutch
 Is on our own divinity;
Cry "Brother"! Heal us with the touch
 Of thy God-soul's affinity.

Speak Thou! Thy mountain top we see.
 Make firm our feet and strong our hands.
Not less the hight for us may be
 Than where transfigured Manhood stands.

HALLOWE'EN

The glowing coals within the grate
With pictured tales foreshadowed fate;
For she who watched with tender eyes
The glowing phantoms fall and rise,
Within her breast the wizard bore
To whom alone such fairy lore
Will yield its tale of coming days.
The elfin light about her plays
With waving lines in shining maze,
With dance fantastic weaves a charm
To blind her eyes to shades of harm.
Her hand her rounded chin supports,
The flickering gleams her soft hair courts;
And bright curls, vagrant from their place,
Throw flitting shadows o'er her face,
But light sinks deep in her sweet eyes
Where happy love a-dreaming lies.

AFTER-GRACE

November, the priest!
Rise, O friends, from the feast,
The long feast of the year.
The parting is near.
The blossoms of Maytime
We wreathed in her playtime
For wine-cup and brow
Droop, winter-kissed, now.
We have drunk the rich summer.
Each sun-bathéd comer,
Brown, languorous, sweet,
Laid its gifts at our feet;
Was there canker in fruit?
Was there worm-bitten root?
Or a cup whose pale shine
Spake of tears, not of wine?
That chord is completest,
That harmony sweetest,
Where in weird undertone
The minor notes moan
Enriching the spell.
All in all, we fared well
'Neath the tent of the year;
Now, brown-cassocked and spare,
Comes November, the priest.

" Rise, O friends, from the feast.

" Our Father in Heaven,
For grace Thou hast given
We, Thy children, give thanks.
For the love that has fed us,
The guidance that led us,
For the hope that maintained us,
The rod that restrained us,
We, Thy children, give thanks.

" For the trials that proved us,
For Thy Spirit that moved us,
Blind, stumbling, but willing;

" For the light that went thrilling
And shimmering thro' May;
For the velvet green-grey
Of mid-June; for the calm
Of frost nights; for the balm
Of long thoughts by the fire
Where the sweet past ranks higher
Than aught else; for these
Interlacing of care and of ease,
God of sun, God of rain,
God of joy, God of pain,
We, Thy children, give thanks."

A FAREWELL

I heard the Old Year hobbling out
With a crunch, crunch, crunch in the snow;
I thought he stopped with a farewell shout,
As one who is loath to go.
And I said, "They wait for the little New Year
That will come in the Old Year's stead;
There'll be none of all who have tasted his cheer
To wish the old fellow God-speed."

I put down my garlands and ran to the door —
The wind and the rain in my face;
The jubilant clock, and the bells in a roar;
And the little Year tripping apace!
A fluttering scarf and a sigh on the wind;
Was't the Old Year's sigh or mine?
O little New Year, in the garlands we bind
Is it holly or rue we twine?

EASTER SONG

Awake, the Lord calleth!
The sunshine that falleth
On each frozen clod
Of the winter-dead sod,
Is the mercy that healeth,
The touch that unsealeth
The eyes sealed by death.
Awake to the breath
Of His spirit that's living
In winds of His giving,
In sunshine and showers,
In fragrance of flowers,
In busy wings flitting,
And merry notes greeting.
The Master hath risen!
Awake, oh, awake!

GROWN OLD

Grown old? Ah, my friend, was it old that they
said?

The children that passed? Why, the day is not dead
Whose dawn dewed the meadows our quick steps
still tread!

Youth is arrogant! Old? Turn your face to the
light.

What? your roses have fled and your temples are
white?

Can age creep upon us like fog in the night?

The sun-smitten fog's but a cloud in the blue,
Yet never a June shall our roses renew.
What? old in a world that forever is new?

We stand on the threshold and open our eyes,
(In the lore of this world we never were wise)
And still we step forward in timid surmise.

Still, like children, our eyes seek the dawn in the
east
(Perhaps its soft rose has its home in the breast,
And the same fire lights both the east and the west).

The new blue of the skies, the new green of the
trees

Are as fresh now as then in their power to please;
How measure the ebb of our springtide by these?

But they say we've grown old! Bright-headed they
throng,
Boys and girls in green mantles, and pause in their
song
To give reverence due — not with them we belong.

Is there spring of the spirit? sap rising anew?
Body fades and soul grows! — Please God, it is true
That work lies ahead for the spirit to do.

Ah, well! we've grown old then, and younger eyes
lean
To seek in our eyes what the mysteries mean
Of that vague thing called "Life," which they yet
have not seen.

IN LOUISIANA

There lies, not far, a forest grim
With ghostly avenues and dim
Wherein Mage Merlin well might lie
Dead to the world thro' sorcery.
A forest draped in misty moss,
Dank from the branch, or swung across
In hoary garland, drear and dread,
To fright intruder from his bed.
So wrinkled looks it and so old,
So wintry seems it and so cold,
One scarce can credit that it lies
Beneath the warmth of southern skies.
That just beyond in masses bright
The water-hyacinth's purple light
Fringes the shores of Lake Manchac;
That neighboring fields are flashing back
From curving blades of sugar cane
His sallies to the sun again.
That life and growth run riot near
Aglow with color, warmth and cheer.

These forest aisles are gaunt and grey
As fearsome secret hid from day;
Dark-bearded warders guard the way
To the enchanted depths where, sure,
Some charm-built dungeon walls immure
A weeping princess, whose sad sight
In hopeless seeking finds no light
Save where a baleful dragon lies
On guard, with sleepless, green-fire eyes,
Coiled round her tower in fold on fold,
Gleaming in crimson and in gold.

THE ROSE

Before the king upon his fête-day came
A lowly damsel. Courtiers, scarlet-robed
And rich in jewels; grouped about the throne
And through the spacious hall — rare in the light,
Green, rose, and golden, sifting through the panes
Of rich device. Upon the throne, the king
Marked, silent, now this gilded throng, now that,
Shining in borrowed radiance; then his thoughts,
Wandering, through the casement glory leapt
Into a wide beyond.

There fell a hush.

Then waked the king once more to time and place;
And down the glowing hall he saw her come,
A simple maid and lowly. Through the throng
All unabashed she came; her eyes entranced
Naught seeing but the king. Wide eyes, deep lit,
And sweet beyond expressing! Wonder-sweet
Her pale, uplifted face! As one who came
Obedient to a high behest, she knelt;
Her lips, a-tremble, moved, but she spake not,
Only in clasped hands outstretched she held
A crimson rose, and went now red, now pale.
A moment still, each merry dame and lord
Paused, wondering vaguely at the maid's rapt face;
Then seized th' occasion for another jest,
And smiling scorn was tost from eye to eye
And light amusement, veiled as courtiers will.

But he, the king, looked deep into her eyes,
Too innocent for hiding, purest light,
As clear in glow as pools at sunset are;
And as he looked his palace fell away,
And he beside the maid in wildwood paths
Wandered untrammelled; free to live and love . . .
The open road beneath the sun and stars
And a free wind that ever ran before;
A nightly shelter under ancient oaks
That swung their sinewy branches low a-down;
The cool of forest pools, the chase of deer,
And ever welcoming, these upraised eyes,
Full-orbed with love unquestioning.

Again

The king awaked to time and place. Again
The pillared hall pressed close, and minstrelsy
Rose, falsely jocund, mocking him. He caught
The jest that gathered boldness as he dreamed. . . .
"I take the rose. When state and power shall fail,
Perhaps at Lord Christ's side in Paradise
This rose will bloom for me. Is't so, sweet maid?"
"Yea, sire," she answered, kneeling, "it is so."

LOVE'S GIFTS

Love, wouldst thou gold? 'Tis gold I bring!
No galleon speeding with swift wing
Thro' dangers of the Spanish Main
Brought e'er such treasures home to Spain
 As my heart brings to thee,
 Full-freighted from the sea
Of human yearning stretching far
Beyond the utmost, shining star;
And, searching, thus has found in thee
Its haven through Eternity.

Love, wouldst thou power? 'Tis power I bring!
Beyond all power of pope or king!
A god-power, for thou mayst control
One quivering, earnest human soul
 That knows thee son of God.
 As the divining-rod
That turns where living waters hide,
My spirit turns to thee, my guide;
Thy feet rough uplands tread; for me
That path, too, leads to victory.

Love, wouldst thou wisdom? Lore I bring!
Rich wisdom of Love's gathering.
All knowledge opens to the eyes
Anoint with oils of Paradise.
Let Love, the heaven-born, guide
Our souls through paths untried.
Then . . . what though jungles far divide,
Or each from each the grey mists hide?
All space with sure wings we traverse,
And meeting tread the universe.

THE COLORIST

Each man may read the truth of the world,
Each man in his native speech;
For one the measured march of sound
The innermost shrine may reach;
For one, the miracles hid in the dust;
For one, where the planets roll;
For me the word of God is writ
In the flame of his seven-hued scroll.

In the thin, blue veil of the morning mist,
Like Morgana's curtain dropped;
In the purple-green of the distant wood
Wherewith the heavens are propped;
In the flare that flames like a funeral pyre
When summer hastes to her death,
Or like viking ship in crimson and gold
With a dead king laid beneath.

No tiniest flower but in its cup
The wine of His grace hath caught,
No season of bloom or of shadow-veined snow
But there His brush hath wrought.
In the purple of night, in the gold of noon,
In the twilight's rose and grey,
In the angry orange of the storm
As he glowers before the fray,

Over land and sea, over earth and sky
Is the heaven-born radiance shed,
And my soul in ecstasy rises to meet
The glow of His canvas spread.

DUTY

The call to duty is not always kind.
A harsh "Thou shalt" we sometimes hear;
A quick command to a rebellious mind,
A sudden lash sting hard to bear;

Perhaps a burden on weak shoulders laid,
That seemed for hardier sinews meant;
Perhaps a call to vigorous action made
On souls whose vigor had seemed spent;

Perhaps the breaking up of ties that bind
To life such brightness as it lives;
Perhaps the giving up of dreams that wind
So close the heart breaks as it gives.

Ah, well for us if duties erewhile done,
Unquestioned done through duty-love,
To strengthening links of duty habit grown,
A cable to the sinking prove.

THE MISTLETOE

Hoary mystic, have thy say;
From the deep woods, grim and grey,
Where, through sacred aisles of oak,
Chance preserved from woodman's stroke,
Ghostly bards still chant the lore
Magic Merlin taught of yore,
And priestly shades in dim moonlight
Still perform the mystic rite
Which held thee sacred in the day
Before the oldest Cæsar's sway;—
Thence, not by golden sickle shorn,
Thence by hands unreverent torn,
Thou, magic crystal, shadowing dim,
Strange dominion, legends grim,
Art brought to grace the revels light,
Where youth and mirth reverse the night.

What to thee the springtime flood
Of passion in a young man's blood?
What to thee the light that lies
In happy girlhood's veiled eyes?
Thou sawest the fierce emotions rage
Around the victim's ozier cage,
When heathen faith could give its blood
T' appease a godhead's angry mood.
(The ozier cage has had its day,
The crumbling altars pass away. . . .

Ah! can we say the god of wrath,
The heathen god, no worship hath?
That human sacrifice hath gone
With passing of the Druid stone?)
Thou sawest the savage Briton dare,
With naked front the Roman spear;
Thou sawest the frantic, mingled host,
Warrior and priestess, fury-tossed,
When Rome, even Rome, the mighty, quailed
Ere Boadicea's great heart failed.

Beneath the lamps thy faded green
And clustered berries, tear-like sheen
Are mocked by thoughtless, merry sport,
A prophet bewildered in Folly's court.
Yet prophet of doom well mayest thou be,—
"As once with those, so yet with thee."
Nay, death is death, and love is love,
And love is life, tho nations move
To funeral dirges as they pass.
In vain thou holdest the shadowy glass.
In the light of each other's eyes they see
In its grey convex but the hopes that be,
And the love that will live when the hopes are
gone,
When the revels end, when the music's done.

THE PERFECT LOVE

Among the streams that, bubbling, well
Upgather from the hidden cell
Of Being, lies a silent spring
Of depths beyond man's measuring.
O Father, turbulent the rush,
The troubled, seething, upward push
Of passions struggling to be free,
Eddying incessantly;
They boil and bubble and subside;
Those silent waters still abide,
And evermore the cleansing flood
That winds its constant way to God
Resistless, bears upon its tide
The soul's sad garnering purified.

Forspent are we with questionings;
Our conscience halts at minor things;
Our highest earth-loves feel the taint
Of clay; the fear that drove the saint
Of old to desert hermitage.
We dream, yet fear to dream; the page
Of vision dimmed with shadowy doubts.

We love, yet fear to love ; self flouts
That lovely flowering of its days,
That beckoning of its dancing Mays.
So worn with doubts that will not cease,
We seek the fountain of release,
That love in whose transcendent light
All lower loves commingle white ;
A perfect love, a perfect peace,
Within whose depths all questions cease.

FELLOWSHIP

O thou whose spirit faileth
In the night of agony,
Alone where fear prevaiileth,
Thy Christ is calling thee.

A cup the Master proffereth,
The draught He drank for thee.
His fellowship He offereth,
At one with Christ to be.

At one with Love that heedeth
Foremost the human cry.
At one, e'en though that leadeth
To a cross on Calvary.

WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

Watchman, what of the night?

The sky in Northern crimson drest,

Should flash the coming of a guest

To reveling creatures east and west.

Watchman, what of the night?

All's well without, all's well.

The dew reflects the dim starlight,

The firefly gleams a moment bright,

I hear faint voices of the night.

All's well without, all's well.

Watchman, what of the night?

Within the storm rack gathers fast;

Ideals of the sacred past

Are shattered by the howling blast.

Watchman, what of the night?

All's well without, all's well.

The crownèd darkness keeps her state,

The solemn hours inviolate,

Move silent in the march of fate.

All's well without, all's well.

THE QUEEN DECIDES

Characters

THE KING

THE QUEEN

ULRIC, *a page*

ALICE, *a maid of honor*

BEATRICE, *her sister*

A charwoman

A child

A counsellor

A foot-page

Ladies of honor

Scenes

ACT I An inner court of the palace.

ACT II Scene I—A balcony opening on a rose garden.

Scene II—The Queen's tiring room.

Between the first and second scenes of the second act is the space of a night.

THE QUEEN DECIDES

ACT I

SCENE—*A large, paved hall, or inner court of the palace. At the back and sides extends an arcade, ivy-grown and set with small trees and rose vines, in sculptured tubs. At short intervals are marble seats. At the back, a marble stairway runs to an upper balcony. In the center is a fountain with a low coping.*

As the curtain rises, Ulric and Alice are discovered seated on the coping, laughing.

Alice

She is half blind; her eyes are like a crow's,
Half shuttered with a hoary film. She sees
Scarce further than her nose; except for that,
We were mewed up like two birds in a cage.
I, since our gracious Queen has asked for me,
Am freer — but, poor Trix! Ulric, the Queen's
An angel!

Ulric

Yea, I know.

Alice

I would she'd put
My love to some hard test. So slight am I —

But there is nothing that I would not do
To chase the shadow from her eyes.

Ulric

The Queen's?

I know of none so happy!

Alice

Nay, thou'rt wrong.
Thou dost not love her as I do. Some say,
With half a glance upon the sunlit sea,
" 'Tis green " or " blue." Yet, even then, beneath
Its foamy crests the beating purple bleeds
Up from its heart of sorrows. Oh, I've seen!
Till I could scarce forbear to cry aloud
For pity of it. Ulric, I would die
For her!

Ulric

And I for you.

Alice

Thou sayest! But I
Was telling thee of Granny. Yester eve,
Trix stood upon the balcony, and I
Clipped roses just below. The balcony,
Thou knowest (on the morning side above
The shrubbery), is low, so low that one
Upon the ground can clasp with ease the hand
Of one thereon and talk in whispers.

The Queen Decides

[*Act I*

Ulric
(*bitterly*)

Thou knowest, not I!

Nay,

Alice

List then, Sir Pert, and thou
Shalt also know even as I know. Upon
The balcony stood Trix, and I below;
And as I clipped, we chattered. Granny heard
Within, and clump, clump, clump, came hobbling. I
Had seen upon the garden seat, forgot,
Father's hat lying. So I clapped it on,
Seized Trixie's hand and whispered. Foolish Trix
Could naught but giggle. Saints! how Granny
stormed!

You would have thought, forsooth, my dress — 'twas
this,

Indeed, this self-same dress, rose-colored, would
Have caught her eye; but, no, the hat was all
She saw, and once I feared she would have caned.
Had I not laughed, she would. Poor Granny
thought

'Twas Bertold. It was sport!

Ulric
(*laughing with her*)

Sport! Alice, list,
I'll tell thee sport more rare. Thou hast a hat.
I'll drop a hint in Bertold's ear.

(Alice does not understand, but looks at him bright-eyed, awaiting the development of his plot.)

Ulric

Thou hast

A hat thou wearest pleasuring, a-droop
With jealous plumes — 'tis big enough, God wot,
To hide worse sins of feature e'en than Bert's.
His girl-face well might pass, and Bert could use
A twilight at the balcony with Trix.

Alice

(makes an O of her mouth, and clasps her hands delightedly at her breast)

Rare, rare! the greatest sport I've had since Yule!
Do thou tell Bertold, and I'll vouch for Trix.

Ulric

But when?

Alice

To-morrow eve.

Ulric

To-morrow eve

For Trix and Bert. This eve — Hath Trix no hat,
Sweet Alice, I can wear?

Alice

Oh, I'd not dare!

Ulric

Not dare! what, thou?

Alice

(very demure)

Oh, what a chubby child!

Look, Ulric, see how cunning.

(A child of two has entered the court from the back, and is toddling unevenly toward the fountain.)

Ulric

Just at dusk.

Alice, thou wilt?

Alice

Ah, what a darling child.

I wonder whence she comes. Come hither, sweet.

Ulric

(crossly)

Let her alone! Belike, the little imp
Comes from the servants' hall.

Alice

The little imp!

How canst thou, Ulric? Little cherub, 'tis.
She will not heed me. Go thou; fetch her here.

(The child, without noticing the lovers, continues her journey toward the fountain. Ulric

mutters under his breath. Alice, with a teasing look at him, starts toward the child, but draws back as the King enters, accompanied by an old counsellor. The King's face is flushed and angry. The counsellor, firm-lipped, walks a pace behind.)

King

(violently)

No more, no more! or, old friend as thou art,
I'll hold thee traitor like the rest of them.

Counsellor

(looking at him compassionately)

And as a faithful servant, as one who
Hath loved and served you from your glowing youth;
Hath watched with pride your selfless statesmanship,
Far-seeing, and your eye still single for
Your people's good; as one who held you, Sire,
A man of men, a perfect king, I dare
To say that he alone is traitor who
Shall place above his country's desperate need
His limbs, his life, his fame, his hope, his love,
Yea, e'en his wife, O King! Shall dare for that
Brief span of life that shall be his and hers,
To seal to serfdom unborn generations.

(The King turns and stares at the counsellor, wild-eyed, grey-faced, but answers nothing.)

The Queen Decides

[*Act I*

*They pass out. Alice and Ulric stand pale
and frightened with clasped hands.)*

Alice

O Ulric, what is it?

Ulric

I know not, sweet.

Perhaps the Austrian.

Alice

The Austrian?

Ulric

They say the Emperor urges that our king
Shall set at rest the question of succession.

Alice

Well?

Ulric

That will mean the Austrian yoke or war.
And after war, the Austrian yoke.

Alice

(falteringly)

But our

Prince Ruprecht?

Ulric

Is no closer to the throne
Than Austria's emperor. 'Tis hard. . . . An heir
Born to our King were our sole hope.

(Both are silent for a space, with young, troubled faces. Then Ulric laughs and shrugs his shoulders.)

Ulric

The bridge
Is not yet reached. There are worse things than
war.
Sweet Alice, may I come? At dusk, beneath
Thy balcony? Thy promise ere I go.

Alice

(unsmiling)

Yea, Ulric, I'll be there. And, Ulric, see
Thou glean what news thou canst. The council
meets
This morn. Thou wilt?

Ulric

Yea, sweet, if there is aught
To glean.

(He kisses her hand and goes, but pauses at the door and looks back laughing.)

Have Trixie's hat at hand, else war
Is immanent.

(Alice laughs and waves her hand, but when he is gone she sits looking at the water with a troubled face, her hands clasped about her knee. The child, unnoticed, has climbed upon

The Queen Decides

[Act I

the coping, and lies flat upon it, playing with the water. The Queen comes down the staircase at the back and approaches the fountain.)

Queen

What, Alice, art thou here?
I called for thee but now. They sought thee in
Thy chamber.

Alice

(rising and kissing the Queen's hand)

I am here, your majesty.

Queen

(laughing)

I see thou'rt here.

(She puts her hand under Alice's chin and looks into her face caressingly.)

Alice, thou art pale;
And as I speak, tears gather to thine eyes.
'Twill never do — Leave sadness to thy queen.

Alice

You're sad, Madame?

Queen

Yea, and I know not why.
(sees the child in her perilous position)

Act I] *The Queen Decides*

Ah, quick! the child!

(runs forward and lifts the child in her arms)

There! that does well! A perch
Of dangerous pleasure. Alice, where thy thoughts?

*(The child caresses the Queen's face with her
hands and coos delightedly.)*

Queen

Who careless left thee here, thou pretty babe?
Dost thou know, Alice?

Alice

Madame, nay, but I
Should say the child hath wandered hither from
The servants' hall.

Queen

What is thy name, sweetheart?

Child

Dolly.

Queen

And who left Dolly here alone?

Child

Muvver.

Queen

And who is mother?

The Queen Decides [Act I

Child

Pitty chain.

Queen

Does Dolly want it? There.

*(Takes the chain from her neck and throws it
about the child's.)*

Now, darling, who

Is mother, pray?

Child

Her's Muvver.

Queen

(regarding her smilingly)

True, who else,

Or what but Mother!

*(The child, still playing with the chain, nestles
closer into the Queen's arms, sleepily.)*

Queen

Cuddle there thy head,
Thou errant nestling, lost, and unafraid!
So!

(seats herself on a marble bench)

Sleepy? cuddle down. Thy morning nap
Is tempting thy sweet lids. Thy mother's lap,
Is't softer than the Queen's? Ah, heavy eyes,
I'll kiss them shut and croon them motherwise.

Alice, is she not sweet; her cheeks are down.
Note thou her eyes; no jewels in my crown
So lambent are, and on the verge of sleep
Their mystery grows unfathomable, deep
And still more deep till we are lost therein —
Or, rather, found.— A woman's soul can win
Its true self only in their sweet serene.

(Broods.)

Alice

(after a pause)

Madame, shall I not seek the mother?

Queen

(jealously)

She

Will come; have thou no fear — Ay, she will seek
Even to the Queen's bed-chamber. It will teach
Her greater watchfulness. Nay, let her seek!

(sings)

Bird, little bird, at my casement
Singing so cheerily,
There are crumbs of sweet cake for thy roundelay's
sake —

What more wouldst thou have of me.

(Only the babe that is sleep on thy knee.)

Nay, little bird, not so.

(speaks)

Nay, Alice, I am selfish. Go. By now
The mother is distraught. The corridors
Are devious. She may seek all day nor find
The child. The baby must have strayed. Go thou,
Find her and lead her hither. Until then
The Queen will play the mother. Do thou go.

(Alice goes out at the back.)

Queen

(sings)

Wind, little wind, at my casement
Tapping so ceaselessly,
There are odors of rose in the Queen's garden
close —

What more wouldst thou have of me?

(Only the babe that is sleep on thy knee.)

Nay, little wind, not so.

(speaks)

So might I sing, sweet bird, wert thou my own.
(O mother-heart, that never child hath known!)
So might I mouth thy hands and dimpled knees
In mother hunger; kiss this tangled fleece;
So might I list thy breathing in sweet fear,
Jealous of sudden draughts; so might I hear,
Perchance, what dream-mates seek thee to beguile,
What angel whispers soothe thee thus to smile.

Ah, little, crooked, rosy smile! A-tilt
A moment on thy lips! Hast heard the lilt
Of babes untempted from the star-shot air?
List, if it hap my child sings wistful there.

How sound she sleeps. Sweet, gold-tipped lashes
sweep

A-down, a-down. Ah me, I well could weep!
(*reenter Alice, accompanied by a charwoman*)

The mother! A rough stalk to grow so sweet
A blossom. She no other hath, or else
This were not kept so daintily. Good dame,
Give thee good day.

Woman

God save Your Majesty.
(*She steps forward with a look of frightened
pride to take the child. The Queen waves her
back.*)

Queen

She sleeps — and dreams. How came she in this
court?

Woman

(*still frightened*)

I was at work. . . . I bring the child. . . . I have
No one to leave her with, Your Majesty.

The Queen Decides

[*Act I*]

(the Queen nods)

I was at work, and when I looked, the child
Was no where near.

Queen

(to Alice)

Then she was searching when
You found her?

Alice

Searching, Madame, and almost
Beside herself with fearful conjecture.

Queen

She might well be. Know, dame, we found the
child
Her little body poised far o'er the curb,
With sleepy fingers dabbling in the fount.

Woman

(stepping forward imploringly)

Give her to me. . . . My babe. . . . It is not fit
Your Majesty should hold the child. . . . Give me!

Queen

(waving the woman back)

Thou hast but one?

Woman

(looking hungrily)

But one, Your Majesty.

Queen

Hadst ne'er but one? Thou art advanced in years.

Woman

One had I years ago, Your Majesty.
The fever took him from me and there was
No other till the Blessed Virgin heard
And sent me this.

Queen

The Virgin heard — thy prayer!
Yet thou art poor; thy life already hard.
The child, so young, through thy long day of toil
Must be a constant, anxious care. Thou hadst
Thy share of burden. Wherefore didst thou pray?

Woman

Your Majesty, what is a woman's life
Without a child? . . .

*(She stops embarrassed. The Queen flushes,
but speaks kindly.)*

Queen

Thou speakest well — say on.
Thou art an honest woman and a true.

Woman

The fever came and took the boy, my first.
He was so big and fair; his legs were stout
And hard as turnips. He was but se'en months,
But sturdy as a yearling. Then the heat . . .
My babe was one of many babes they said
To die that summer — It was naught to me
How many — I was young — and hard of heart.
It was so cruel quick, Your Majesty,
So quick it came! Like as to-day he crowed
And laughed, leaped in my arms, and in three days
They put him underground, and I was left
With a full breast, and ne'er a babe to feed.

God bless Your Majesty, that you can weep
With a poor soul like me.

Queen

Some day shalt thou
For that child's sake be mother to a horde
Of summer-sickened babes . . . A scheme I
have . . .
But Mary sent thee comfort in thy grief?

Woman

At first, Your Majesty, I did not want
Aught but my sorrow for my baby ta'en.
But my good man grew rough, I wept so much

It fretted him — the neighbors chid; and then
It seemed 'twas naught would heal me of the hurt
Except to feel a babe against my breast.
And so I prayed. But Christ, He punished me
For my long weeping. 'Twas nine heavy years
Ere Mary sent the girl.

Queen

A pretty child.

(puts the child into the mother's arms)

I shall not soon forget her ready trust.
She shall not want a friend. What is thy name?

Woman

(curtsies)

My name is Margot, save Your Majesty.

Queen

Take thou this, Margot, for the living child
And for the dead.

*(The woman kneels to take the purse extended
by the Queen.)*

Woman

God bless Your Majesty,
And send you your desire.

Queen

(turns sharply away)

Thou hast my thanks,

Good woman. Alice, guide her way beyond
All chance of error. I'll await thee here.

(Exit Alice and the charwoman.)

Queen

(draws a quick breath and speaks)

The queen is pitied of the humblest wench
Who takes her knotted fingers from the tub
To soothe her hungry brood. This toil-worn
drudge,

Her home a hovel and her man a clod,
Her portion, oaths, perhaps, and drunken blows —
And yet, for that in that vile slime hath blown
A golden blossom, that her grimy hut
Hath shared the glory of the manger, that
Her sunken breast was judged fit fount to feed
A little child, a cushion soft enough
To pillow a small head — she pities me!
As here about the court they pity me!
And he — does he, too, pity —

(She rises in a sudden revulsion to ecstasy.)

Pitied? I?

I, mated to the noblest soul that e'er
Worked hand in hand with God. God never meant
A woman sole for motherhood. A charge
As holy — holier — Oh, it were sweet
To feel the touch of little lips and hands;
To bring his child into the world — to watch

With him its growth — in tender rivalry
Each tracing other in the burgeoning
Of feature, heart, and brain. Oh, it were sweet! —
But greater boon is mine.— Not mother, I,
But wife am I. Companion for all time
To that lone soul, who stands too close to God
For friend to know as fellow. Chosen, I,
To stand beside him in that higher air —
Consoler — lover — friend! My king! my king!
Through all eternity, mine — mine — so close
That each is other — who of womankind
So blest as I! God, from His treasury,
Gave me His chiefest jewel — glorious,
And I sole priestess in that service — Blest,
Oh, blest am I! — Not mother,— nay, but Wife!
*(She stands in a dream, her eyes glowing, her
face soft and filled with tremulous light.)*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

A low balcony overlooking a walled garden. In the moonlight, Alice, dressed in white, stands near a carved pillar against which she leans. Beatrice, her younger sister, flutters excitedly from the open window to the balustrade.

Beatrice

If Granny wakes, I'll hold her, do not fear.
I'll find some way to keep her.

Alice

Play some prank

To call a lecture down.

Beatrice

I wonder now

What she was like when our grandfather wooed.

She says she had a many lovers. La!

'Tis either they were brave or else she made

A compact with the devil. He, I'm sure,

Is now in league with her to torment us.

Thus! Nose on chin, mouth so, and back — there,
do

I look like her? She says I do. Oh, me!

I hope I'll die before the wrinkles come.

Oh, there he comes!

Alice

Where? where?

Beatrice

Was not that he?

It must have been a waving shadow.

(Giggles.)

Alice

Fie!

Trix, go within. Thy sudden outcries will
Wake Granny ere he comes. To-morrow eve
Is thine. Go in.

Beatrice

I'll go before he comes.

See, there he is! Fair faith, this time! He creeps
There by the plum tree — just beyond the fount.
I'll go — and I'll keep Granny; never fear.
Oh, la! I wish it were to-morrow eve.

(Goes.)

*(Ulric approaches guardedly. Seeing Alice, he
discards caution, leaps a marble bench into the
full moonlight, and advances eagerly.)*

Ulric

Sweet love!

Alice

Ulric, what news?

Act II] *The Queen Decides*

Ulric

Hast thou not, Sweet,
Some kinder greeting for me?

Alice

Do not tease.
Thy heart is sad as mine. What news? What
news?

Ulric

None other than thou'st heard; the piteous news
Which ran in rumor round the court to-day.

Alice

But is it true?

Ulric

Yea, it is true, I fear.

Alice

Thou dost not know?

Ulric

Dear Alice, it is true.

*(Alice bows her head upon the balustrade and
cries. For a space there is silence except for
the faint sound of her weeping. After a
while, Ulric speaks, timidly.)*

Ulric

No wonder, Alice, thou didst bring to court
A heart so gay and tranquil. Thou hast lived

A rose among the other roses of
This lovely garden. Never elsewhere
Saw I the blooms so thick. How staunch they are!
The royal blood will tell! Their little heads
Are held at night as proudly as by day.
The lilies droop as lilies would; and these
Small blossoms underfoot curl inward on
Themselves in fear; but they, the roses, lift
Pale, smiling faces to the moon, who smiles
On us, my rose, as he has ever smiled
On lovers since the world began. Look up,
Sweet rose, and smile.

Alice

(sobs)

Oh, never, nevermore!
No smile, no love, forevermore for me!
My faith in love is dead. There is no love!
And he, the cold moon, smiles on treachery.

Ulric

Treachery?

Alice

Yea, treachery. Oh, I
Could cry aloud to all the winds of heaven
Against this cruel thing. I can't believe!
O Ulric, is there not another way?

Ulric

Dear Alice, there is none. A man may love
A woman past the whole round earth, save that
Small spot that calls him son. His faith supreme
Belongs to God and that. I love thee well;
The lady of my heart art thou, so dear,
So very dear that this sweet earth is sweet
Only because I know each morning's sun
Brings vision of thy face, thy dancing eyes,
Thy mouth all sweetness. Oh, I love thee more
Than my poor, stammering tongue can tell; but if
Thou, so desired, wert held at price of faith
To king and loyalty to country — if
To clasp thee I must needs turn traitor —

Alice

Then

Thou'dst never clasp me!

(breaks down and sobs afresh)

Ulric, I was wrong!

Ulric

(passionately)

Alice, I love thee most, I think, because
Thou art so true.

Alice

But how can God be good,
And set this fearful crisis on the land,
That means disaster whatsoe'er the choice?

Ulric

What know we, Alice? Thou art young, and I.
When thou art near, unhappiness seems far;
And gladness springs to meet thee like the grass
That in the sunshine cannot choose but grow.
What know we, Alice? Let us trust, and turn
To that one thing we know — our wondrous love;
Our love, this moonlit spot, and thou and I
Together. Nay, this balcony is yet
Too high; bend lower, love, that never breath
Of jealous night-wind come between thy lips
And mine the while we whisper. Love, sweet love!

Alice

Oh, not to-night! Speak not of love to-night.
We, too, would seem to range ourselves with all
The heartless elements that make no sign.
Is there no bond? — the night, the stars the same,
The same soft sound of whispering wind in trees,
The same still, sleepy note the darkness holds
As tho this monstrous thing were not to be.
Ulric, I am afraid. Life is not what it seems.
What bitterness for thee and me it holds —

(A voice within calls "Alice.")

Alice

(hysterically)

Hark! Granny calls. Even this, even this the
same!

Act II] The Queen Decides

I must go in. Farewell.

Oh, she will find

Us, Ulric! I am coming, Granny. Go,

Dear Ulric — See — I'll — make atonement —
thus.

(She bends. Their lips meet.)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The Queen's boudoir. The Queen and her ladies are embroidering tapestry. Back of them are long windows through which the tops of trees are seen, still in the mid-day heat. To the right and left are doorways screened with heavy curtains. The Queen is seated on a dais with an ebony embroidery frame beside her. The maids of honor sit around the dais. They look pale and uneasy, and keep their eyes on their work. Alice, seated on a stool at the Queen's side, touches her harp listlessly.

Queen

(looking up, aware of the silence)

But why are ye so silent all? 'Tis well

We give your hands some fresher task to do;

It may awake ye from your walking sleep.

Had ever queen such maids? Ye scarce have spoke
This morn, whose tongues outrun your fingers as
A rule. Have ye had nightmares, one and all?
Or are ye love-lorn? Alice, sing again,
And wake these lotus-eaters from their dreams.

Alice

(sings)

Oh, heavy the toil of the dizzy noon.
The air like a cap of steel
Presses down on the earth a-swoon,
And the pitiless blaze a-reel
Weaves a dance of death around beast and tree,
While the heart with its fountains dry,
Beats with a slow throb, hopelessly,
For its young dreams lifeless lie.

Oh! thy pain is bitter, thy pain is deep,
But the night cometh on apace;
The lilies lie on her breast asleep,
And a dream is in her face.

She comes with the balm of a petal-soft air,
And the perfume of jessamine blown;
Thou art wrapped in the swirls of her dew-dank
hair
And the moon-mist folds of her gown;
She toucheth thy forehead and toucheth thy breast,
And her calm is transmitted to thee;

Act II] The Queen Decides

As a nurse with her nurseling she crooneth to rest
With a low-toned melody.

Oh, thy pain is bitter, thy pain is deep,
But the night cometh on apace
When the fields are healed in the dews they weep,
And the gasping heart finds grace.

Queen

A pretty song, my Alice, sweetly sung;
But what hath turned our lark to nightingale?

(turning to the others)

A plague upon ye for a flock of owls!
Out with ye to the sunshine every one,
And see that ye absorb enough to keep
Your tongues and faces bright thro' working hours.
Thou, Alice, may'st remain and strive to play
More lightsomely the David to our Saul.

(All go out but Alice and the Queen.)

Queen

(laying her hand on Alice's head and speaking very kindly)

Dear child, whom well I love, what paling blight
Hath struck thy spirit's brightness. Thou hast been
Unlike thyself all morn. Art troubled? — Ill?
Speak freely to thy friend.

Alice

Am well.

Nay, Madame, I

Queen

(smiling down at her)

What then, my girl? But yesterday
Thy bright eyes shot their gladness restlessly
As light cast from a shifting mirror held
In teasing hands; and not less hard to catch;
For I have seen poor Ulric spin about
A random circle, mazed to know which way
To fly his falcon. . . . Is't a lovers' tiff?

*(Alice struggles to control herself, but bursts
into tears and buries her face in the Queen's
lap.)*

Queen

Poor little heart! 'tis like to break. Ah! child,
I fear thou hast not learned thy lesson yet.
Love means not cherishing of little griefs,
Nor nursing memories of little slights.
Perhaps thy lover knows not his offense.
The man's mind moves with larger radius;
And if thy little signals are uncaught,
And he hath seemed neglectful, it may be
He hath not seen them; then is thine the blame,
Who knows not Love unless he worketh signs,
Or folds his mighty wings and strives to be
Thine impish boy with bow and random darts.
Ah! Alice, gird thy soul, and try to raise
Thyself to the full stature of great love.

Act II] *The Queen Decides*

Let thine own flight be high, and thou shalt know
The ecstasy of onward rushing stars.

All little happenings will pass thee by;
For what of toil and fret and moil can vex
Those who amid the ambient clack and blare
Can whisper each to each, "Love, I am here."
My girl, I who am blest with such a love
Speak thus.

*(Alice starts to her feet wildly, and stretches
out her arms to the Queen with a gesture of
passionate protection. She seems to try to
speak, but cannot.)*

Queen

Well, speak on, child. Thy queen will hear.
*(Alice flings her arms around the Queen's neck
convulsively, then rushes from the room.
The Queen stands looking after her, troubled
and doubtful.)*

Queen

There is a quality about her grief
That moves strange fears. They flock like
shrouded ghosts
About me; strangely peer from well-known eyes.
All whom I meet to-day avoid my glance
As though upon their consciences there lay
An injury unconfessed. The King — affairs
Of state kept yesterday — this morn, he rides

At an unwonted hour — not yet returned
Although the hour is late.

(She goes to the window and looks out. Returning, she sits at her embroidery frame, but rises again immediately, and pulls the bell-cord.)

Queen

I stifle here!

The room's a prison.

(A little page appears.)

Queen

Anselm, hath the King

Returned?

Page

I know not, Madame.

Queen

Quickly then,

Go thou and see.

(The page goes. The Queen paces up and down the room in a tremor of undefined fears. She turns quickly as the page reappears.)

Queen

Well, Anselm, hath he come?

Page

Yea, Madame, as I reached the court I saw
His Majesty dismount, and hastened back
To tell thee of it.

Queen

Did he ride alone?

Page

Madame, I know not if he rode alone;
He was alone when he dismounted. Sooth!
The horse, it was all foam! He may have left
Companions on the way. His Majesty
Had ridden hard. He and the horse were spent.
Madame, he must have met the Erl-king in
The forest!

Queen

(frowning)

Prattler, go; and tell the King

The Queen awaits his leisure.

(The page goes.)

The Queen again begins her pacing. She has gone the length of the room once and has turned, facing the door, as the King enters. She darts to meet him, but stops with a suppressed cry and clasps her hand to her breast. The King advances with a strong step, his head erect, smiling quiveringly. His face is horribly ashen, his eyes bloodshot.)

(whispers)

Conrad!

(The King stands near her, smiling, but does not touch her.)

The Queen Decides

[Act II

King

Queen?

Queen

(still whispering)

Conrad, art thou ill?

(The King attempts to answer, but his face breaks up into a contortion of agony. He turns away and stands by the table, trying to steady himself. The Queen shrieks.)

King

(turning toward her)

My wife —

Queen

Conrad,

Why dost thou speak to me in such a tone?

Why dost thou look so? Is thy tidings death?

King

(with a groan)

My wife, is death so hard? I wish it were!

(Again the Queen cries out, and stands rigid, her eyes on the King.)

King

(taking her hands)

My wife, my life, as closely one with me

As mine own soul; and in that highest bond

Act II] The Queen Decides

Of mated soul with soul inseparable
As long as I am I and thou art thou,
Whatever hap—

Queen
(*echoes dazedly*)
Whatever hap—?

King
(*chokes and begins again*)

My Queen,
The Emperor waits no longer. He insists
Upon decision — will not further brook
Delay —

Queen
(*still dazedly*)
The succession?

King
Yea, the time hath come!
No longer may we lay the question by.
A thousand times I've faced it in the night,
When thy sweet, sleeping presence added flame
To furious Hell. And now the hour has come . . .
The farce of settlement betwixt the mouse
And lion.

Queen
Mouse and lion?

The Queen Decides [Act II

King

Ruprecht, or

The Emperor.

Queen

It is Ruprecht, then.

King

And war.

The issue is undoubted.

Queen

Then, the Emperor.

King

In either case, the Emperor. And the doom
Of serfdom on a happy land, that now
First hears the clank of chains. My father kept
Them free, my father's father, his, and his;
Back through the blackness of the centuries
They kept unscarred their little, smiling realm,
That blossomed out in sturdy peasantry.
They loved their people singly.

Queen

Dost not thou?

King

Nay, I love my wife!

Queen

(her hands at her throat)

Ah. . . . Conrad, speak —
What wouldst thou say? say on.

King

An heir would save
My people.

Queen

(whispers)

But thou knowest —

King

(after a pause, and speaking slowly)

Queen, they claim —
Thy people claim the king, the queen, above
The man, the woman. They assert their right
To hold in peace their fields; to blood unspilled
Of father, husband, son — To sheltered homes,
Where no tax-gatherer grinds the peasant down
To starved and sodden brutishness to fill
The pouch of foreign tyrants. They assert
Their right to freedom.— I must crucify
My people — or — my wife!

Queen

His wife! his . . . wife!
To crucify his wife. . . . An heir to save
His people. . . . Dost thou mean, to take

Another wife . . . to bear an heir . . . and I
Go forth a Hagar to the wilderness?

King

God!

(turns sharply away)

Queen

O God! my trust has never faltered. I
Have borne the hunger of the childless heart;
The quivering motherhood within me walked
In daily torture over fiery shards.
Each child's eyes pierced afresh my bleeding
wounds; —

Yet that Thy choicest gift was mine — his love,
So wholly mine, I thought, the world was lost
To our two meeting souls — for that I walked,
Childless, among the motherless, and held
Against my barren breast plump baby limbs,
Spread out my motherhood, a royal cloak
To shelter loveless children. God, I sought
To stand beside him worthily; to work
A help-mate at his side. Oh, have I failed?
Because I have no child, must I be thrust
Away from love as well? Is childlessness
A leprosy to drive a woman forth
An outcast from her kind, beyond the pale
Of law and sacrament — unclean? O, thou,
Thou, thou, to whom I gave such living wealth

Of love as never woman gave — my king —
Oh, I have thought the hoary legend true
Of wandering angels lured by love of maid
To leave their heritage. The wonder of
Thy kingly soul stooped low to garner mine,
The wonder of the upward flight with thee
Hand-claspt — heart-claspt — to starry heights to
which

Alone I had not risen —

(whispers)

Conrad, thou,
Dost thou not fear for me? From such far hight,
How far shall I not fall if thou release
Me, helpless, guideless? Shut in darkest night,
Alone, alone, no husband and no child,
How shall I feel I have a God? Oh, save!
Conrad! The blackness closes round me! Shalt
Not thou account to God for this soul lost?
'Tis thine; unwinged and meaningless apart
From thee. Thou canst not, Conrad, say thou
canst not!

King

My wife —

Queen

Yea, yea, thy wife. I knew thou couldst not!

King

Wife of my soul through all Eternity,
My love, my life, my star, shall I unclasp,

Roughly unclasp thy clinging arms and thrust
Thee forth despairing? Queen, if that thou goest,
Thine is the deed, not mine. Lo, here I lay
The Emperor's demand. 'Tis thine to say
What answer shall be sent to Austria.

*(The King has one arm about the Queen.
With the other hand he places a folded paper
upon the table.)*

*The Queen, shrinking against his shoulder,
looks at him, breathing quickly. There is a
pause.)*

King

When hast thou failed to counsel well? When
blenched
The front of battle? Never peril seen,
Unseen, or dimly seen in fearful guise
Of dreaded foe or deadly pestilence,
Could cow thy wifely pride to lay thy hand
Detaining on thy husband. Cheerfully,
Not once, but many times, for public good,
Hast thou not offered both thyself and me?
And shall I doubt thee now? This hour art thou
Sole sovereign to decide, and thy decree
Is final. I and all the land abide
Unquestioning the consequence.

*(The Queen still clings to the King, silent,
but her face enkindles slowly.)*

King

O sweet —

O woman, soft and gracious, wife and saint,
To worship as to love, it may be well
That pitying Heaven grant the battle chance
To save from madness — In the stricken field,
Not mine alone,— a thousand ardent swords
Will spring to thy defence; a thousand hearts
In fiery loyalty will offer up
Their life-blood in thy cause, and hold it next
Their hope of Heaven to die for thee —
(The Queen draws back with a cry.)

King

I give

Them, Queen, young, gallant, loyal souls, into
Thy keeping.
(The Queen holds out her hands entreatingly.)

King

(speaking with intense tenderness)

Nor our chivalry alone!
Thou angel of the lowly born, whose care
Administering in uncouth huts hath wrought
The miracle of thrift and cleanly lives. . . .
Thou childless mother of the weak, the poor,
Whose charity is wide as suffering;
Thou, hailed in country lane and city street,

Throughout this length and breadth of land, as
saint —

I lean on thee — my resolution gone —

Into thy hands I lay my people's fate!

*(The Queen has drawn back step by step, until
now she stands between the curtains of the
doorway. Her eyes exult into his.)*

King

Speak thou, my wife, my counsellor. I give

My manhood to thy keeping, confident.

*(They stand looking, each upon the other, in
exaltation. They stand upon the Mount of
Transfiguration.)*

Queen

(softly)

I go.

(She smiles and is gone.

*The King, left alone, looks about the room,
unseeing — his hand touches a silken scarf
upon the table. He picks it up, looks at it,
and lays it down again. On the opposite
wall, in a shrine of silver, is a small portrait
of himself; before it, the Queen has placed
fresh violets. He walks over, takes the vio-
lets, smiling musingly as he wipes the moisture
from their stems. Still smiling, he puts them*

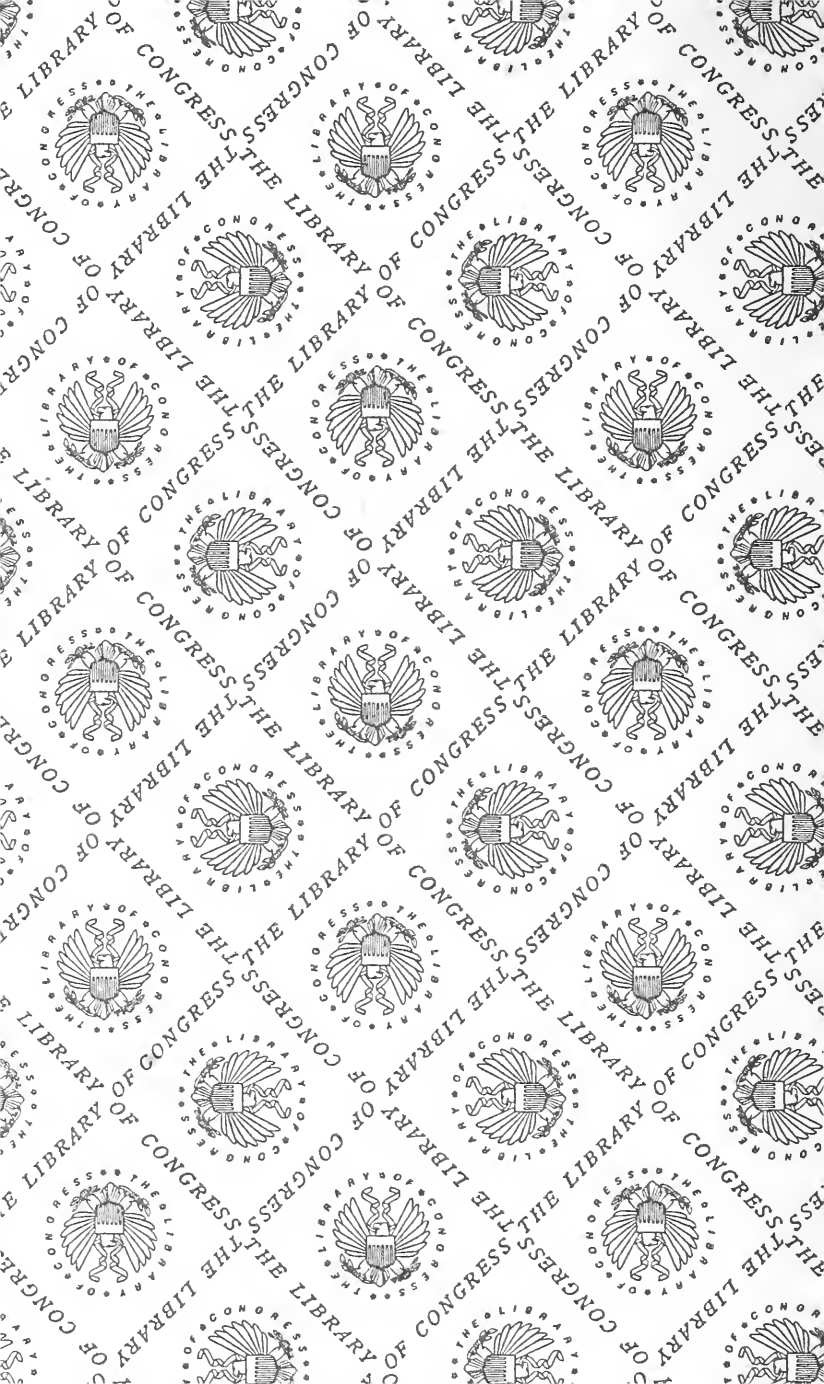
Act II] The Queen Decides

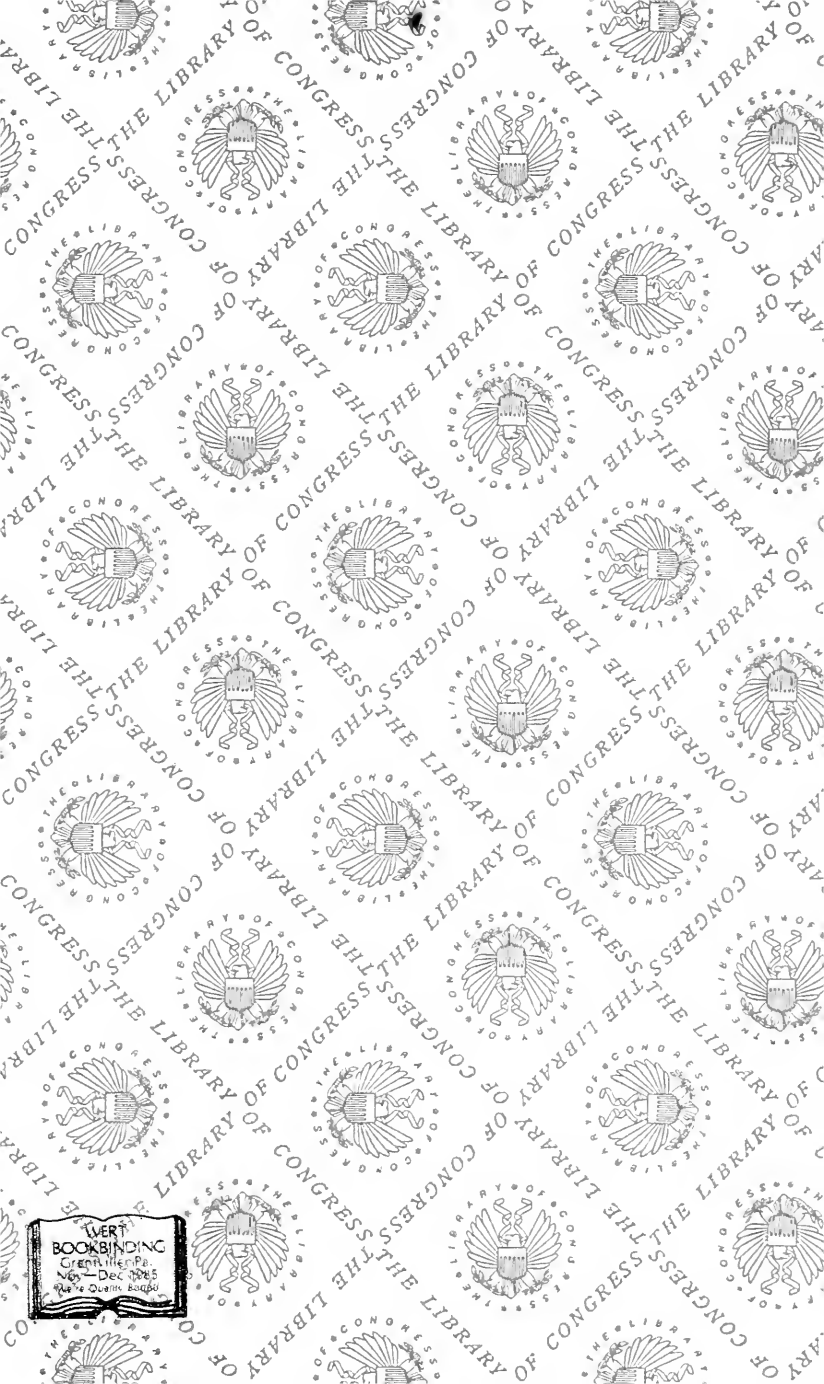
in his bosom. At length, the strong agony breaks forth. He throws his arms toward heaven with an accusing gesture — and falls to the floor.)

CURTAIN









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